



MOTOR VEHICLE INJURIES AMONG TEENAGERS

WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEM?

- Motor vehicle-related injuries are the biggest health threat to teenagers in the United States, accounting for two in five deaths in this age group.
- More than 4,700 teens, ages 16 to 19 years died in motor vehicle crashes in 2001. In fact, drivers in this age group are four times more likely to crash per mile driven than older drivers.
- The risk of crash involvement is highest for 16 year olds, who have a more pronounced combination of immaturity and limited driving experience.
- The presence of teen passengers increases the crash risk for unsupervised teen drivers; the risk increases with the number of passengers.
- In 2001, fatal and nonfatal crashes involving drivers ages 15 to 20 cost Americans \$42.3 billion.

WHAT HAS CDC ACCOMPLISHED?

CDC monitors trends in motor vehicle-related injuries among teenagers and conducts and supports research to understand risk factors for this age group. CDC scientists analyzed data from the agency's 1991, 1993, 1995, and 1997 Youth Risk Behavior Surveys and found that teens' drinking and driving behavior did not change between years. More than one in three students reported that within the past month, they had ridden with a driver who had been drinking alcohol, and one in six reported having driven after drinking. CDC researchers also examined the 20-year trend in alcohol-involved fatal crashes. They found that while alcohol-related fatal crash rates decreased among drivers of all ages, there was almost a 60% decrease among drivers ages 16-20 years. This strong downward trend suggests that prevention measures specific to this age group, such as the implementation of the national minimum legal drinking age or zero alcohol tolerance laws for young drivers, have been effective.

Learning to drive safely takes time and practical experience. Graduated drivers licensing (GDL) is one strategy that allows for skills development. In this system, young drivers are limited by restrictions that are systematically lifted as they gain driving experience and competence. GDL studies around the world have found 5% to 16% reductions in crashes among teenage drivers. Thirty-seven states and the District of Columbia have some form of GDL law, but the strength of the components varies widely. CDC is supporting research to examine the effectiveness of particular components of GDL. CDC contributed to a special edition of the *Journal of Safety Research* documenting the research evidence about GDL.

Example of program in action: CDC is collaborating with the National Institutes of Health on a study of the impact of parents' actions on their teenagers' driving behavior and motor vehicle crashes. Findings will help answer important questions such as whether setting clear driving expectations, supervising teenagers' driving, limiting driving in high-risk conditions, and penalizing unsafe driving will result in fewer risky driving behaviors, fewer traffic violations, and most important, fewer crashes among teenagers.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

CDC will continue to monitor trends and conduct research to look at risk factors. CDC will continue to collaborate with the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration and experts to emphasize research priorities that target ways prevention and work to increase participation in effective programs.

For more information about this and other CDC programs, visit www.cdc.gov/programs.

February 2003